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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [SI](#) [HR](#) [REGIONAL](#) [ISSUES](#)
SUBJECT: BORDER POLITICS TEST GOOD NEIGHBORS

REF: A. ZAGREB 1079
[1](#)B. ZAGREB 1026

Classified By: Ambassador R. Bradtke for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY AND COMMENT: Ambassador raised the recent flare-up in Croatia's ongoing border dispute with Slovenia (reftels) on September 15 with MFA State Secretary Hidajet Biscevic, urging continued high-level communication with Ljubljana and a measured and non-confrontational approach to the issue. FM Grabar-Kitarovic's September 15 briefing for Ambassadors laid out Croatia's case, sparked only minor debate from the Slovenian Embassy representative, and reassured those present that the highest levels of both governments are working to smooth the situation over. Neither the FM nor the State Secretary mentioned any new or direct approach to their Slovene counterparts. If both sides can keep the lid on things until after October 22 Slovenian local elections, there will then be an opportunity to press for arbitration in a less highly charged atmosphere. END SUMMARY AND COMMENT.

[1](#)2. (C) The brief September 13 detention and release by Croatian police of a Slovene television crew that reportedly illegally entered Croatia led both sides to deploy special police to the area until early on September 15. Two days of alarming press reports led the Ambassador to raise the issue with MFA State Secretary Biscevic, urging continued dialog with Ljubljana. Biscevic agreed and noted that PM Ivo Sanader is working closely and carefully with Slovenian PM Janez Jansa to help Jansa manage a difficult internal political situation. He asserted that the Slovene Minister of Environment is driving the issue on the Slovenian side of the border as part of the political jockeying underway prior to October 22 local elections. Biscevic emphasized that the dispute was not a crisis. That said, it would not be resolved quickly either.

[1](#)3. (U) FM Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic briefed the diplomatic community on the 15th to ensure EU-member embassies in particular would hear Zagreb's side of the story, after Slovene FM Dimitrij Rupel reported the incident to the European Commission. The FM provided a detailed map and overview of the work being done on the border, along with a history of the back-and-forth between the two governments specifically about the construction work. The area flooded in 2005, leading the GOC to pursue the necessary construction without Slovenian involvement. Both sides agree the border is undetermined in this area. She stressed that the GOC hoped to resolve these issues through a bilateral agreement. The FM asserted that the media has misreported and "misused" the story, and rejected any linkage of the border issue to Croatia's EU bid.

[1](#)4. (U) State Secretary Biscevic also spoke to the group, rejecting any Croatian responsibility for recent events; emphasizing that Croatia had made no unilateral moves;

denying that there was any political motivation on Croatia's part; and pointing to measured Croatian responses at every turn. The Embassy of Slovenia (DCM) reminded everyone of the September 2 joint statement by the Prime Ministers regarding the lack of agreement about the border in that area, and on that basis rejected the GOC assertion that Slovenia police were on Croatian national territory, which could not be determined with any certainty. However, he emphasized that Slovenia has offered all possible support to Croatia's EU accession, which will be to the benefit of both countries. The FM expressed her gratitude for that support.

15. (U) Particularly inflammatory for the Croatian public was press reporting indicating that the Slovenian authorities had felled trees to block roads in the area. This immediately brought to mind the timber roadblocks set by ethnic Serbs when they established the so-called Serb Republic of the Krajina at the beginning of Croatia's war of independence.
BRADTKE